

**REMARKS BY U.S. CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES JUDITH CHAMMAS AT THE
DIVISIONAL IMAM TRAINING ACADEMY, ISLAMIC FOUNDATION OF
BANGLADESH, CHITTAGONG
TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2006, 3:00-4:30 P.M.**

DHAKA, MARCH 14, 2006 -- As part of America Week activities, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Judith Chammas visited the Imam Training Academy in Chittagong on March 14, 2006. Her remarks follow.

Mr. Mohammad Abul Khair, Director, Dhaka Imam Training Academy; Mr. Mohiuddin Nurul Absar, Deputy Director, and Senior Officials of Chittagong Imam Training Academy; Respected Imams; Colleagues from the U.S. Embassy, USAID and The Asia Foundation - Assalam -u- Alaikum and Good Afternoon

I am very pleased to be here today and to have the opportunity of meeting you all and learn more about the important you are doing.

I know that the Imam Training Academies of Bangladesh are playing a very key role in enhancing the knowledge and skills of Imams around the country, which make meaningful contributions towards the development of their communities.

Imams' activities in the community such as delivering social and economic development related information in their Khutba messages, convening village and community gatherings and in raising community awareness on issues that affect common citizens' life are important to development. Imams need to be fully informed about the challenges of the modern world, which is why the Embassy has supported setting up computer rooms and providing computer training for imams at the different branches of the Islamic Foundation.

I am also pleased that the U.S. Government through USAID is seeking a variety of ways to partner with imams who share our interest in community development. Since Imams in Bangladesh can act as positive agents of change,

targeting and engaging Imams and other religious leaders in the development process will only strengthen the overall participation of community leaders in development.

USAID partners are encouraged to involve local imams in their projects. Areas of common interest include access to public health care and education, aquaculture, fisheries, social forestry, enterprise development, democracy and governance, human rights, anti-trafficking in persons, HIV/AIDS awareness, amongst other themes.

One of the ways that we encourage this collaboration is by supporting the efforts of the Asia Foundation to collaborate with the Islamic Foundation. This program features an **Imam Orientation Program** that aims to strengthen the capacity of religious leaders to enhance public understanding, commitment, and participation in national development efforts. As some of you know, this is carried out through exposure to the work of USAID partners as a supplement to Imam Training Academy's existing 45-day Imam Training Program and refresher training courses.

Once again I would like to thank The Asia Foundation as well as the Islamic Foundation for their collaboration in today's event and throughout the year. Together we can all make meaningful in-roads into the development of Bangladesh.

Thank you!

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GR/ 2006